

“Global Shake in the 21st Century”: Sochi Meeting Probes the Utopia of a Multipolar World

The annual Valdai Club meeting in Sochi, Russia, was another lively affair for envisioning a post-unipolar global order

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The annual Valdai Club meeting has always been positioned as absolutely essential when it comes to understanding the non-stop movement of geopolitical tectonic plates across Eurasia.

The [ongoing 18th meeting in Sochi, Russia](#) once again lived up to expectations. The overall theme was *Global Shake-Up in the 21st Century: The Individual, Values, and the State*. It expands on the theme of a “crumbling world” that Valdai had been analyzing since 2018: as the organizers highlight, this “has ceased to be a metaphor and turned into a palpable reality before our own eyes.”

Framing the discussions in Sochi, Valdai released two intriguing reports capable of offering prime food for thought, especially for the Global South: [The Age of the Pandemic: Year Two](#), [The Future is Back](#), and [History, to be Continued: The Utopia of a Diverse World](#).

The “Future is Back” concept essentially means that, after the Covid-19 shock, the notion of a linear one-sided future, complete with “progress” defined as globalized democracy enshrining the “end of history,” is dead and buried.

Globalization, as framed by neoliberalism, proved to be finite.

The slide towards medical totalitarianism and the trappings of a maximum-security penitentiary are self-evident. As some Valdai participants noted, Foucault’s concept of “biopower” is no longer abstract philosophy.

The [first session in Sochi](#) went a long way in terms of framing our current predicament, starting with how the current incandescent US-China clash is unfolding.

Thomas Graham, from the Council on Foreign Relations – the conceptual matrix of the US establishment – recited the proverbial “indispensable nation” platitudes and how it’s

“prepared to defend Taiwan,” even as he admitted, “the Biden administration is still articulating its policy.”

It was up to Zhou Bo, from the Center for International Security and Strategy at Tsinghua University, to ask the hard questions: if the US and China are in competition, “how far are we from conflict?” He stressed “cooperation” instead of a slide into confrontation, yet China “will cooperate from a position of strength.”

Zhou Bo also clarified how Beijing is “not interested in bipolarity,” in terms of China “replacing the USSR during the Cold War”: after all, “China is not competing with the US elsewhere in the world.”

Yet even as “the center of gravity is moving irreversibly to the East,” he admitted the current situation “is more dangerous than during the Cold War.”

Surveying the global chessboard, former Brazilian foreign minister Celso Amorim stressed “the absurdity of the UN Security Council deciding even matters related to the pandemic.”

Amorim voiced one of the Global South’s key demands: the “need for a new institutional framework. The closer we get would be the G-20 – a little more African, a little less European.” This G-20 would command the authority the current UN Security Council lacks.

So Amorim had to tie it all to the centrality of inequality: his quip about “coming from a forgotten region,” Latin America, was very much on point. He also had to stress, “we didn’t want a Pax Americana.” A real, “concrete step” towards multipolarity would be “a big conference” that could be led by this “modified G-20.”

Togtbaatar Damdin, a Mongolian parliamentarian, evoked “my great, great, great grandfather,” Genghis Khan, and how he built “that huge empire and called it Pax Mongolica,” focused on what matters to the here and now: “peaceful trade and economic integration in Greater Eurasia.” Damdin stressed, “we [Mongolians] no longer believe in war. It’s much more profitable to be involved in trade.”

A constant theme in this and other Valdai sessions has been “Hybrid War” and “Shadow War”, the new imperial instruments deployed against parts of Latin America, the greater Middle East and Russia-China, in contrast to “a transparent system under the rule of law – and kept by international law,” as noted by Oksana Sinyavskaya from the Institute for Social Policy at the Higher School of Economics.

The discussions in Sochi essentially focused on the twilight of the current hegemonic socio-economic system – essentially neoliberalism; the crisis of alliance systems – as in the rot within NATO; and the toxic confluence of Hybrid War and the pandemic – impacting billions of people. An inevitable conclusion: the current dysfunctional international system is incapable of dealing with crisis management.

In the roundtable [presenting the Valdai report on Year Two of the Age of Pandemic](#), Thomas Gomart, a director of the French Institute of International Relations (IFRI), stressed how hard it still was to analyze the geopolitics of data.

With the Chinese privileging the concept of “ecological civilization,” questions of technological monitoring – as in how social credit is framed – are now on the forefront.

And as we delve deeper into “invisible wars” – Gomart’s own terminology – we face a toxic convergence of environmental degradation and hyper-concentration of digital platforms.

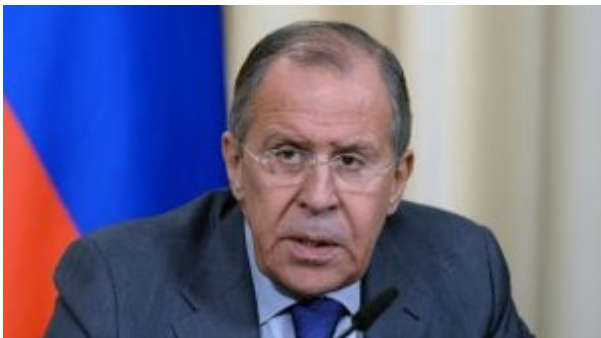
Gomart also made two crucial points that escape many analyses across the Global South: Washington has decided to remain the *primus inter pares*, and won’t abdicate from this position no matter what. This is happening even as global capital – heavily slanted towards the US – wants to find the new China.

That set the stage for Nelson Wong, the vice-chairman of the Shanghai Center for RimPac Strategic and International Studies, to diplomatically shatter divide and rule tactics and the US obsession with a zero-sum game. Wong stressed how China “does not hold a hostile attitude towards the US”; its aim, he claims, is a “peaceful rise.”

But most significantly, Wong made sure that “the post-pandemic world will not be determined by the outcome of the confrontation between the US and China, or by splitting the world into two competing camps.”

This hopeful perspective implies the Global South will eventually have its say – aligned with Amorim’s proposal of a tweaked G-20.

The Valdai discussions in Sochi significantly take place just as Moscow decided to suspend the work of its mission to NATO from November 1, and close the NATO information office in Moscow.



Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov had already stressed that Moscow no longer pretends that changes in the relationship with NATO are possible in the near future: from now on, if they want to talk, they should contact the Russian ambassador to Belgium.

One of the questions at Sochi had to revolve on whether Moscow should expect NATO to take the first step to improve relations. Lavrov had, once again, to repeat the obvious: “Yes, we proceed from this. We have never started the deterioration of our relations with NATO, the European Union, or any other country in the West or any other region of the world.

“Everyone knows this story well. When Saakashvili in August 2008 gave the criminal order to bomb the city of Tskhinval and the positions of peacekeepers (including Russian ones), Russia insisted on convening the Russia-NATO Council to consider this situation.

“The then US secretary of state Condoleezza Rice categorically refused, although when creating the Russia-NATO Council, the founding act emphasized that it should act in any ‘weather,’ especially when crisis situations occur. This is one example that marked the beginning of the current state of affairs between the US and NATO.”

So Russia has established the new game in (Atlanticist) town: we only talk to the masters and ignore the lackeys. As for NATO now geared to create “capabilities” to be used against China, the Global South may collectively engage in rolls of laughter – considering the fresh NATO humiliation in Afghanistan.

With the inevitability of an EU more and more geo-economically intertwined with China, dysfunctional NATO at best may keep on prowling as a bunch of zombie rabid dogs. Now that’s a Utopia theme for Valdai 2022.

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